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Fairy-Tale Origins, Fairy-Tale Dissemination, and Folk Narrative Theory

*This article, for Ines Köhler-Zülch, is dedicated
to her warm personal hospitality
and great intellectual generosity*

Grimms' *Children's and Household Tales*, and in particular, its prefaces, mark the historical origins of fairy-tale studies. Although its title is generally translated into English as *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, folk narrativists well know that the collection's 'fairy tales' are a minor component among a broad variety of folk tale subgenres. Folktales tend to reflect the belief system and the world of their intended audience. Taking their characters from the everyday world, they are peopled with husbands and wives, girlfriends and boyfriends, an occasional doctor, lawyer, priest or preacher, a few thieves, and – in societies with an agrarian component – many peasants. In a typical folktale one person appropriates another person's money, dignity, or honor. Marital strife looms large.

In terms of plot, a large proportion of folktales have dystopic endings¹. A typical example, the tale type ATU 1430, recounts the fruitless consequences of building castles in the air. In Grimms' tales it appears as KHM 164, *Lazy Heinz*:

A peasant dreams of selling his jug of honey and using the profit to buy chickens. In his daydream, he'd sell their eggs and buy a piglet, which would soon produce more piglets. The piglets' sale would allow him to purchase a goat ... and so on until he imagines making so much money that he would build a house, marry, and have a son. As the peasant's daydream continues, he'd beat his son (in a typical displacement of an impoverished peasant's own ill treatment). As the peasant flails about, he knocks his precious jug of honey from the shelf above his head. It falls to the floor and breaks, destroying the lazy peasant's honeyed future in the dust and dirt of his hovel.

As in many folktales, the protagonist's position in the plot begins at a socially low level, rises dramatically, and then falls, equally dramatically. Like *Lazy Heinz*, folk tales are generally brief, related to everyday life, and have a simple linear plot that is easy to remember.

¹ Uther, Hans-Jörg: *The Types of International Folktales. A Classification and Bibliography. Based on the System of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson.* vol.s 1–3 (Folklore Fellows Communications 284–286). Helsinki 2004.

Fairy tales differ from folktales both in their cast of characters and in the trajectory of their plots. Two major kinds of plot dominate the genre of fairy tales; both have happy endings and much royalty. The first grouping consists of what I call *restoration tales*. A typical restoration tale begins with a prince or princess leaving, or being forced from, home. The ejected royal protagonist has adventures, suffers, and eventually – with the help of magic – marries and is restored to a throne. The Grimms' *Twelve Brothers* (KHM 9) is a classic restoration tale:

A king and queen have twelve sons, but the king vows that if they have a daughter, the boys will be killed and their inheritance given to the girl. When the queen bears a daughter, her brothers flee into the forest. Eventually the young princess finds her brothers' tiny baby shirts and learns about them. She goes in search of her brothers, but accidentally enchants them. To redeem her brothers, she suffers seven years' silence, nearly dies, but through magic marries a king and lives happily ever after.

Prototypical restoration tales begin at a high social level with royal protagonists. Expulsion from their royal estate plunges the royal hero or heroine into suffering, from which – through magic and marriage – they are eventually restored to their rightful royal position. Restoration tales have been popular at least since classical antiquity, and consequently there is broad narrative variation within the classic high-low-high trajectory. Some heroines, such as the little sister of the Grimms' *Twelve Swans* (KHM 9), play an active role. *Sleeping Beauty* (KHM 50), on the other hand, is a restoration fairy tale with a notably passive female protagonist. Her expulsion is a temporal one, her suffering (in the Perrault version) a century-long sleep that ends with her restoration to royal station by marriage to the prince who arrives at the end of the hundred-year enchantment. (The concluding episode with its mother-in-law persecution is a classic narrative add-on, derived in this case from Basile's *Sole, Luna, e Talia*.)

So ingrained are restoration tales in western narrative consciousness that on occasion a morality tale adopts the narrative trajectory of classic restoration fairy tales, although morality tales usually do without the magic that generally accompanies a restoration fairy tale's concluding return to a high social position. *King Thrushbeard* (KHM 52), which details the crushing of a haughty princess's pride, provides an example of a morality tale that borrows a restoration fairy-tale high-low-high narrative trajectory:

A proud princess rejects one suitor after another, until her father decrees that she shall marry the next man who comes to court her, whoever that person may be. An apparent vagrant appears, marries the princess, takes her away from her life of ease and plenty, and repeatedly mortifies her pride, until finally – her pride broken – he reveals himself to be one of the royal suitors she had previously spurned. Already married, they subsequently live happily ever after.

The second kind of fairy tale is a *rise tale*. A rise tale begins with a poor hero. *Puss in Boots*, whose plot first appeared in Renaissance Venice as Straparola's *Costantino Fortunato* (Night 11, Story 1), provides a perfect example:

An old woman dies leaving her youngest son Costantino only a brindle cat. A fairy in disguise, the cat turns her magic to Costantino's benefit. Snaring game, she carries it to the king to gain his good will, and while she is there, she pockets food from the royal table for her hungry master. Eventually she washes her impoverished master clean of the filth of his poverty and tricks the king into believing him to be a wealthy courtier. Delighted at so noble a son-in-law, the king dowers his daughter richly and marries her to Costantino.

In the modern world, rise fairy tales with male heroes have generally given way to rise fairy tales with a poor heroine. Their origins, too, lie in Renaissance Venice. Often crude and violent, the Renaissance tales bear little resemblance to modern fairy tales, but are nonetheless the progenitors of the beloved modern rags-to-riches-through-magic tale. Straparola's *Pig King* (Night 2, Story 1) is an early rise fairy tale with a female protagonist:

A king and queen's long-awaited child is born as a pig. Growing to manhood, he wishes to marry, but his filthy habits repel all but the poorest women. His mother eventually persuades a desperately poor woman to give her eldest daughter to the pig in marriage. On their wedding night, she is disgusted by his advances and rebuffs him. The prince perceives her murderous thoughts and kills her with a blow to the chest. The middle sister suffers the same fate. However, the youngest sister Meldina embraces her fate and her husband, who reveals his secret: at night he can cast off his boarish appearance and habits. After Meldina tells her mother-in-law of this, the royal parents steal into the princely bedchamber and destroy the pig's skin, thus freeing their son from his enchantment. The tale ends with him as king and Meldina as queen.

In rise fairy tales, the poor protagonist ascends from abject poverty through a marriage that is intimately intermixed with magic to achieve great wealth. Indeed, the wealth itself is thematized in the language of the earliest rise fairy tales. Either the author accentuates the poverty of the character who rises socially, or he states (or depicts) the wealth that has been achieved by the poor character.

These two groups of tales – *The Twelve Brothers*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *King Thrushbeard* on the one hand, and *Puss in Boots* (in its original form as *Costantino Fortunato*) and *The Pig King* on the other hand – demonstrate fundamental differences between restoration and rise fairy tales. Restoration fairy tales are generally longer, because they often have complex subplots. Both restoration and rise fairy tales may incorporate exotic creatures and distant locations. But their cast of characters differs in a significant manner. Restoration fairy tales generally begin and end with royalty or quasi-royalty, while rise fairy tales start with a poor boy or girl who through magic and marriage to a royal husband or wife achieves wealth.

There are tales of a third kind that are usually classed together with fairy tales, but they have distinct characteristics. These are tales about fairyland. In these tales, fairyland is a universe parallel to the human universe and subject to its own natural laws. Time, for example, passes with supernatural speed, so that one year in fairyland typically equals a hundred years in the human world. Mortal visitors to fairyland do not perceive the accelerated passage of time, and because of that

usually suffer disastrous consequences. Even if their visit has seemed brief, they find their own human world changed beyond recognition when they return to it, and they themselves often wrinkle, shrivel, and die as their bodies catch up with the mortal passage of time.

In the later seventeenth century, tales about fairyland existed in France not among the folk, but rather as a pastime among the aristocracy. At Versailles Mme de Sévigné wrote in 1677 that ladies of the court amused themselves for nearly an hour by listening to a story about a princess who was reared by fairies before being carried off by her lover in a crystal ball². Apparently nobody wrote this kind of oral chit-chat down until the Countess d'Aulnoy (1650/51–1705) wrote a long novel, her 1690 *Histoire d'Hipolyte, comte de Duglas*. Into that novel she inserted a tale about a fairyland called *L'Isle de la Félicité*³ with the following plot:

A human hero spends a year in fairyland with his fairy beloved, at the end of which he wishes to visit his homeland. His fairy beloved gives him permission, but warns him not to dismount from his fairyland horse. When, however, he does dismount, death overtakes him.

Tales about fairyland, like this one and like *Le Nain jaune*⁴, another tale about fairyland by Mme d'Aulnoy, often end dystopically.

Fairy-Tale Origins

The Grimms did not begin gathering their tales from peasant informants. On the contrary, their informants for the first volume were well-brought up girls, young women, and their mothers. This statement recapitulates years of concentrated research initiated by Heinz Rölleke⁵. Tales from a woman of the people only came with volume 2 of the first edition when Dorothea Viehmann, a market woman, contributed some forty tales and tale fragments to the Grimms' growing collection. Rölleke showed that the tales long supposed to have been contributed by the famous "Old Marie", a nursemaid in the Wild household, had instead been told by Marie Hassenpflug, daughter of a prominent Kassel banker. Rölleke published this well-documented discovery well over twenty years ago, first in German and then in English⁶.

² Mme de Sévigné reported that the ladies called this activity 'mitonner'. Cited from Rouger, Gilbert (ed.): *Contes de Perrault*. Paris 1967, xxii.

³ Madame d'Aulnoy: *Contes* I. Introduction Jacques Barchilon. Ed. Philippe Hourcade. Paris 1997, 9–26.

⁴ *ibid.*, 485–510.

⁵ See the first overview of his work in: Brüder Grimm: *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* 3. Ed. Heinz Rölleke. Stuttgart 1980. This volume contains lists of informants together with the tales and tale fragments that they contributed, as well as a historical overview of the tales from one Large Edition to another.

⁶ *id.*: The 'Utterly Hessian' Fairy Tales by 'Old Marie': The End of a Myth. In: Bottigheimer, Ruth B. (ed.): *Fairy Tales and Society*. Philadelphia 1986, 287–300 (originally published in *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* N.S. 25 [1975] 74–86).

The girls and women who told Wilhelm Grimm the stories of volume 1 were all literate and well-read. It was characteristic of literate German girls and women in the late 1700s and early 1800s to have had access to many books of fairy tales. Published in German, nearly all of those fairy tales' plots were imports from France, as Manfred Grätz detailed in his study of tales in the German Enlightenment⁷. Kassel's girls and women told these restoration and rise fairy tales to Wilhelm and Jacob when they sat in a garden house or in a Biedermeier living room. Although the brothers' immediate experience of fairy tales was oral, it was published books that were anterior to the girls' and women's oral tellings. 'Oral tradition' for the fairy tales in volume 1 of the first edition consisted for the most part of a book followed by one telling (by a narrator such as a daughter in the Hasenpflug or Wild households) and one hearing (by a listener such as Jacob or Wilhelm Grimm).

Three generations, that is, some hundred years before the Grimms began collecting what they thought were genuinely German tales, Charles Perrault had published his first fairy tale. In a sly little literary joke he called it *Peau d'asne* (*Donkeyskin*). In his day, fanciful or nonsense tales were called contes de peau d'asne, donkeyskin tales, and so when he wrote a tale about a donkeyskin, he was composing a donkeyskin tale. There had been donkeyskins in a number of magical tales before Perrault, the oldest perhaps in Apuleius's *Golden Ass*. There the fictive narrator, a man transformed into an ass, i.e. a donkey, witnessed the sufferings of a girl kidnapped from her family on her wedding day. In a rarely remarked passage, the girl's kidnappers proposed killing and eviscerating the donkey, then stuffing the kidnapped girl herself into the skin and hanging it up with her head protruding from the donkey's nether orifice. Perrault, well schooled in the classics, may well have remembered Apuleius's passage about a girl inside a donkeyskin when he began to write his own donkeyskin tale, though if he did, he gallantly amended Apuleius's coarse image.

Significantly, two tales whose plots paralleled Perrault's first fairy tale had already been in print for a long time. One was in the early seventeenth-century *Pentamerone* of Giambattista Basile and the other one in the mid-sixteenth-century *Piacevoli notti* of Giovanfrancesco Straparola. Laying Perrault's *Donkeyskin* next to Basile's *L'Orsa* (Day 2, Story 6) and Straparola's *Tebaldo* (Night 1, Story 4), makes it evident that Perrault used Basile's and Straparola's tales as a model, as a template, for the donkeyskin tale he was in the process of composing⁸.

Donkeyskin's composition was not the only instance of recycling already existing old Italian tales as new French ones. Perrault's niece Mlle Lhéritier used Stra-

⁷ Grätz, Manfred: *Das Märchen in der deutschen Aufklärung. Vom Feenmärchen zum Volksmärchen*. Stuttgart 1988.

⁸ For details on the French printing history of Straparola's *Facetieuses Nuits*, see Bottigheimer, Ruth B.: *France's First Fairy Tales: The Restoration and Rise Narratives of "Les facetieuses nuictz du Seigneur François Straparole"*. In: *Marvels and Tales* 19,1 (2005) 17–31; for an exacting analysis of the use Perrault made of Basile's and Straparola's precursor tales, see ead.: *Perrault at his Desk*. In: *Romanic Review* (forthcoming).

parola's *Costanza-Costanzo* (Night 4, Story 1) for her *Marmoisan ou l'innocente tromperie*, just as Mlle de La Force turned to Basile's *Petrosinella* (Day 2, Story 1) for her *Persinette*⁹, to name just a few.

Fairy-Tale Dissemination

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, folk narrative scholars accounted for remarkable similarities between certain stories in the canon of the Grimm, Perrault, Basile, and Straparola collections by contextualizing them within a sea of unchanged and unchanging stories, by claiming that these very stories had always existed in the world of the unlettered poor and by further claiming that one need only drop one's net into that sea of stories in order to pull out the same story that a predecessor had pulled out two hundred years or two thousand years before or would pull out one hundred or two hundred years hence. This theory of fairy-tale origins cannot be documented.

Tale dissemination via print pathways, in contrast to the proposition of a sea of stories, can be documented in an increasing number of cases, as presentations by Margaret Mills, Abd-el Hameed Hawwas, and Maria Kaliambou at the 2005 ISFNR Congress in Tartu demonstrated. Dissemination via print pathways can also be inferred from instances of close textual study, as in a textual comparison of Perrault's *Peau d'asne* with Basile's and Straparola's earlier stories, because that comparison shows that Perrault picked and chose only among elements that existed in those two printed texts.

Basile, too, used existing narratives for many elements, out of which he assembled the stories of the *Pentamerone*. Being a classically educated courtier, he – like many of his contemporaries – had read Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and he filled his stories with unacknowledged quotations from Ovid and from other classical authors. Basile's Venetian forebear Straparola, unlike Basile, appears to have had less of a formal classical education, and so it was that he turned more to the current marketplace and piazza for the ingredients of his stories: medieval romances and medieval fabliaux and medieval sermon tales.

When, however, we investigate medieval stories, an immense corpus, we find neither restoration nor rise fairy tales. Instead, we find narratives with familiar individual elements or motifs. Even though some modern fairy-tale motifs can be found in medieval stories, the story plots in no sense approach those of restoration or rise fairy tales. Brief medieval stories do not have the critical magic and marriage elements within restoration or rise fairy-tale narrative trajectories (high-low-high and low-high, respectively). Neither do brief medieval stories incorporate the restoration and rise fairy tale's distinctive cast of characters associated with this narrative trajectory.

⁹ For "Marmoisan" and "Persinette" see Robert, Raymonde: *Contes*. Mlle Lhéritier, Mlle Bernard, Mlle de La Force, Mme Durand, Mme d'Auneuil. Paris 2005, 43–68, 331–338.

All of the claims I've made about print precursors for European fairy tales are documentable. With these assertions in mind, our scholarly perspective changes when we turn and look forward from Straparola towards the fairy-tale future. We see not a process of oral transmission, but a pattern of dissemination that follows publishing routes and book sales. Books are the most likely carrier of fairy tales from one geographical location to another. When nineteenth- and twentieth-century folklorists encountered a restoration or a rise fairy tale, its teller was probably only one, two, or at the very most three steps away from a book source.

In terms of social class, fairy tales were associated with upper social classes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; only much later did fairy tales move to the 'folk'. Eighteenth-century Britain provides a case study for the prototypical direction of that social movement in the publication history of Mme d'Aulnoy's fairy tales and tales about fairyland. Swiftly translated from French into English in the early 1700s, their first printings were published for and were addressed to English noble ladies. Subsequent printings were addressed to merchants' wives, and only later came bowdlerized, simplified editions meant for humble readers. The renowned publisher of books for children John Newbery tried out fairy tales early in his career, but turned away from them until after they had proved their success in the chapbook trade¹⁰.

Despite two centuries during which it has been reflexively assumed that the folk populations of France and Germany had certain knowledge of fairy tales, no direct evidence exists of extensive folk knowledge of fairy tales, or indeed of any folk knowledge of fairy tales before the nineteenth century. Everything in this regard that has been asserted grows out of imputation and attribution. Fairy tales were channeled to the folk through elementary school readings within the relatively newly established public elementary school systems of German-speaking Central Europe from the 1830s onward. Ingrid Tomkowiak studied this phenomenon and demonstrated that after the Grimms had published their first, second, and third Large Editions, and their first, second, and third Small Editions, some of their tales were introduced into school reading books in Germany. That process accelerated through the nineteenth century, until the Grimms' tales had become an unquestioned icon of German childhood. Much the same thing may have happened with Perrault's tales in France as well as in the French overseas colonial empire¹¹.

A book history of fairy tales undermines three modern-day edifices. The first is a political one central to the rhetoric of the Grimms' nineteenth-century political agenda. The Grimms held that language determined nationality. Within the real

¹⁰ See Duval, Gilles: *Littérature de colportage et imaginaire collectif en Angleterre à l'époque des Dicey: 1720–v. 1800*. (Thèse Dijon) Talence 1991; Jones, Christine: *Madame d'Aulnoy's Eighteenth-century Roles as an English Lady and then as Mother Bunch*. In: *Romanic Review* (forthcoming).

¹¹ In this connection, any number of examples may be drawn, for instance, from listings of national locations of individual tales. For a specific case study, see Bottigheimer, Ruth B.: *Luckless, Witless, and Filthy-footed: A Sociocultural Study and Publishing History Analysis of 'The Lazy Boy'*. In: *Journal of American Folklore* 106 (1993) 259–284.

world, this belief translated into a conviction that Schleswig-Holstein, then governed by Denmark, should become part of Germany, because its inhabitants spoke a language that Jacob Grimm considered more German than Danish¹². The Grimms also held that a common knowledge of Märchen in German proved a nationhood of shared cultural heritage. A book-based history of fairy tales also undermines that set of beliefs, because it demonstrates that commercial mechanisms such as book distribution networks rather than national narrative mutualities determined the geographical territory within which fairy tales were disseminated.

A book-based history of fairy tales similarly undermines foundations for assumptions about fairy tales within two schools of psychological interpretation. First, invalidating fairy-tale authorship by the broad and anonymous folk disallows neo-Freudian notions that fairy tales express essential aspects of the human psyche, as Bruno Bettelheim would have it. Second, books as disseminators of a knowledge of fairy tales similarly cast into doubt Jungian concepts of a collective unconscious where stories are concerned. Only depth psychology's therapeutic use of fairy tales as probes into subconscious states of mind retains its validity. Ravit Raufman's 2005 ISFNR talk illuminated one aspect of that question.

Folk Narrative Theory

In folk narrative theory, the consequences of a book-based history of fairy tales and of a rigorous separation of restoration and rise fairy tales from folk tales are consequential¹³. A book-based history of fairy tales requires recasting theoretical constructs within folk narrative theory from the last century. Consider Walter Anderson's (1885–1962) 'Law of Self-Correction', an attempt to account for narrative stability, that is, for the fact that in gross terms stories have changed little over time. Appearing in a classic work, *Kaiser und Abt*, it dealt not with a fairy-tale corpus but with a set of folk tales¹⁴. That alone would disqualify the Law of Self-Correction from being applied to restoration and rise fairy tales. But the central premise, namely, that narratives are orally transmitted and that they maintain their general shape and their specific details over time because of an internal self-correcting mechanism within oral transmission itself could never be proven in experimental situations¹⁵.

¹² ead.: Grimms' Bad Girls & Bold Boys: the Moral & Social Vision of the Tales. New Haven/London 1987, 79f.

¹³ It is also necessary to treat ballads separately from fairy tales. Albert Lord's (1912–1991) oral formulaic theory which well explicates ballads has been adapted and applied to nearly all oral forms throughout the world, including an inappropriate application to fairy tales.

¹⁴ Anderson, Walter: *Kaiser und Abt* (Folklore Fellows Communications 42). Helsinki 1923.

¹⁵ id.: Ein volkskundliches Experiment (Folklore Fellows Communications 141). Helsinki 1951; Oring, Elliott: Experimentelle Erzählforschung. In: *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* 4. Berlin/New York 1984, 684–694.

Fairy tales and tales of all kinds can, of course, be shown to have changed over time, and Laurits Bødker (1915–1982) addressed that question. He developed a ‘tradition bearers’ theory that suggested that each generation of tradition bearers modified narrative traditions. Linda Dégh and A. Vázsonyi refined the idea of group transmission in their ‘conduit theory’ (1971) to deal with problems inherent in the still-surviving conception of individual person-to-person oral transmission, postulating instead of individual tradition bearers, group conduits composed of individuals of similar personality structure whose similarity of attitudes resulted in similarities of verbal expression. To account for narrative change, they posited branching sub- or micro-conduits of smaller groups of similar-minded storytellers and -listeners, as well as multi-conduits to explain multiple versions of the same tale¹⁶.

A book history of fairy tales transcends individual tradition bearers and aggregate conduits. It is able to explain the existence of similar tales in geographical locations far distant from one another, a situation that has been hard to bring into agreement with theories of oral transmission. Nonetheless, positivists adhered to a theory of monogenesis, holding that a single originary tale lay at the beginning of every tale’s transmission history¹⁷. But oral transmission cannot satisfactorily account for a single tale’s having underlain all closely related stories in geographically distant locations.

The evident existence of nearly identical tales at great distances from each other (for instance, France and Senegal, Cambodia, Quebec, or the Mississippi River Valley) and without evidence of such tales in the intervening geographical areas inevitably led to a competing theory, ‘polygenesis’. Polygenesis allows, even claims, that peoples from vastly different cultural experiences would – and did – invent the same narrative, people it with the same characters, and clothe the resulting tales with similar or identical narrative apparel¹⁸. A book-based history of restoration and rise fairy tales resolves the paradox of monogenesis versus polygenesis.

The geographic-historical method, enunciated and then elaborated by Julius Krohn (1835–88) and by Kaarle Krohn (1863–1933) respectively, was demanding in detail and scholarly in outlook¹⁹. The overwhelming success of the geographic-historical method resulted in a host of minor ‘laws’ concerning dissemination, among which were Carl Wilhelm Sydow’s (1878–1952) formulation of ‘oicotypes,’ that is, local variants, in the history of oral narrative²⁰. The method resulted in a host of enormously useful reference works, but because it was firmly

¹⁶ Dégh, Linda/Vázsonyi, A.: *Legend and Belief*. In: *Genre* 4 (1971) 281–304; Dégh, Linda: *Conduit-Theorie*. In: *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* 3. Berlin/New York 1981, 124–126.

¹⁷ cf. Röhrich, Lutz: *Geographisch-historische Methode*. *ibid.* 5 (1987) 1012–1030, here 1013–1016.

¹⁸ Chesnutt, Michael: *Polygenese*. *ibid.* 10 (2002), 1161–1164; see also Wawrzyniak, Udo: *Generatio aequivoca*. *ibid.* 5 (1987), 986–988.

¹⁹ Röhrich (above, note 17).

²⁰ Hasan-Rokem, Galit: *Ökotyp*. In: *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* 10. Berlin/New York 2002, 258–263.

based on a concept of oral transmission, it also spawned an oralist-privileging vocabulary. Printed tales necessarily represented and stood for a 'contamination' of 'pure' orality.

Each of the 'laws' discussed above was based on valid observations of instances of change and continuity in the history of folk and fairy tales. The fact that the same or similar tales exist in widely disparate locations is clear enough. That is not in question. How a fairy tale came into existence and how it got from one place to another have remained problematic issues for generations of scholars. Every logical impediment for understanding fairy-tale dissemination disappears when a literate author replaces an anonymous folk as responsible fairy-tale author and when printed books replace human mouths as the route of fairy-tale dissemination. This is an argument with an ancestry. Between roughly 1890 to 1910, during the period in which folklore societies were being established in Germany, France, England, and the United States, vigorous debates took place among oralists and non-oralists, and without exception the oralists beat back the non-oralists.

Against a strong tide in the opposite direction, Albert Wesselski argued in the 1920s and 1930s in favor of a book history for the dissemination of fairy tales. Nazi-led Germany, however, was inhospitable to non-folk-valorizing and hence heretical ideas. Wesselski's theories were dismissively ridiculed for the next seventy years, but there is increasing evidence, as in Grätz's book, suggesting that Wesselski was more right than wrong. Folk narrativists need a new set of laws and postulates to account for the course of the history of fairy tales. To begin that effort I propose the following theses about fairy tales, their origins, and their dissemination:

Thesis 1. Fairy tales can be defined as complex narratives in which magic brings about closure and in which heros and heroines achieve elevation through a wedding in which one or both of the participants is royal.

Thesis 2. In terms of origins, fairy tales were (and are) assembled from existing narrative elements.

Thesis 3. Dissemination exists in two forms, a micro oral and a macro print form. The micro oral form spans a short period of time and a short distance, and brings about dissemination that survives through a maximum of two to three generations of tellings. The macro print form transports tales over long periods of time, over great distances, and from one language to another.

Thesis 4. Publishers contour book contents to the taste of local buyers. This results in culturally varying versions of single tales, that is, of oicotypes.

Abstract

This article attempts to present a credible alternative theoretical structure for understanding the origins and dissemination of European fairy tales. In this new theoretical structure,

print processes and print culture are central to the creation and the dissemination of European fairy tales; the theses that conclude this article provide four rational, transparent, and documentable statements about the origins and dissemination of European fairy tales.

Résumé

L'article propose une structure théorique alternative vraisemblable qui permet de comprendre les origines et la dissémination des contes merveilleux européens. Selon cette théorie, des processus d'impression et la culture de l'imprimé sont au centre de la création et dissémination des contes merveilleux européens. Les thèses qui concluent l'article fournissent quatre assertions rationnelles, transparentes et démontrables concernant les origines et la dissémination des contes merveilleux européens.

Zusammenfassung

Der Artikel möchte eine glaubwürdige alternative theoretische Struktur zum Verständnis der Ursprünge und der Verbreitung des europäischen Märchens vorstellen. Dieser Theorie zufolge waren Druckprozesse und Druckkultur von zentraler Bedeutung für die Entstehung und Verbreitung der europäischen Märchen. Die abschließenden Thesen liefern vier rationale, klare und belegbare Aussagen zu Ursprung und Verbreitung der europäischen Märchen.